

Give the Jobless a New Frontier

By W. D. Hoffman

What is a job, whence does it come, and why is a job increasingly hard to find and to hold? This always-pressing question grows more critically urgent in America daily in spite of all our wealth and progress. The president's demand for \$250,000,000 more to meet relief needs for four and a half months emphasizes it. Since Nov. 1 the president estimates 3,000,000 more persons in the United States have lost their jobs.

What this dismal fact means to the millions of men, women and children dependent on the jobless wage-earners it is hard for those in comfortable circumstances to conceive. There is dire tragedy here—tragedy threatening the republic itself.

This is the ugly specter of our civilization. In this industrial era to be without a job threatens loss of all a man holds dear. Hopelessness and despondency follow the fruitless hunt for the chance to work. Joblessness destroys the morale of the family head; it shatters the life of dependents. Ambition, dreams and hope lapse into despair. Savings, if any, vanish swiftly, with insurance, the family home, the furniture. Loan sharks enter to pick the bones. Tortured by the fear of refusal when he goes to friends for help or to the grocer for further credit, the jobless man is driven to humiliation and shame, losing pride and courage and all self-confidence, and when final refusal comes he degenerates into lassitude and physical and mental wreckage. Not only his own life has been ruined; the physical well-being of the next generation through his destitute, undernourished children is laid on the altar of sacrifice—sacrifice to the Moloch of an outwardly affluent civilization where in one city alone the bookies are doing a business of \$200,000,000 a year in an orgy of gambling.

How affluent we are, indeed, with our bright, shiny motorcars skimming the highways, jamming the parking lots of race-track, theater

(Mr. Hoffman's article appears concurrently in The Roman Forum, the interesting and well-informed Georgist monthly edited by Dr. Frederick W. Roman, director of the widely-known Associated Forums, Ltd., of California. Mr. Hoffman is a regular contributor to The Roman Forum, which may be obtained for \$1 a year from 214 Loma Drive, Los Angeles, Calif.—The Editors.)

and night club! With standing-room-only at the opera and the burlesque show! With money—scads of it—clinking musically at the cocktail bars, with orchids for milady, and champagne running more freely than the workman's traditional beer. Do not be deceived. Under the crust of this stratified society in which the squanderers make merry, the rumblings of the millions on the verge of starvation can be heard if we listen closely. And one day their rumblings may become a roar.

Times have changed in America—changed swiftly with the disappearing frontier that once offered jobs. Where once men were able to work for themselves, on the soil, in transport and trade, as artisans, in small manufactures and little businesses, today the overwhelming majority must earn their living by working for others. Millions of white collar men who draw salaries are in a kindred position with industrial laborers who draw wages. For them to work for themselves is impossible. Their jobs are their daily bread. All that they are is tied up in their jobs. In his notable book, "Insecurity, a Challenge to America," Abraham Epstein shows with convincing statistics that while the number of wage-earners has been increasing, the number self-employed has become almost negligible. Hence the job, for most Americans, is king. The job is a niggardly, impoverished monarch, it



is true, yielding but a pittance, yet a tyrannical and merciless overlord.

To understand what is happening it is necessary to go back to the original question—What is a job? A job, first, is an opportunity to exert labor in producing or exchanging wealth. This is the Primary Job. It involves taking of raw materials from the ground, fashioning them into desirable forms of wealth, handling of the finished product until placed with the consumer.

This Primary Job is not confined to employes alone. It is performed not only by wage-earners and salaried white collar men, but by employers engaged in supervision and management, necessary functions in production and exchange. Such a productive job is worthy of its hire even if there be no "hire." The holder of the job may be the boss himself. If one save his earned wealth and convert it into seed and tools (capital) he is a producer though he be a director of the labor of others. He is a fair earner, entitled to his part of the product. Only when the factor of monopoly enters into his capital is he able to take an excess over earnings in a free, competitive field. Thus the grocer who supplies his neighborhood with food is a worker holding a Primary Job, though he employs a clerk; likewise the trucking boss who distributes products, though he employs drivers; the shoemaker who has bought a stitching machine and engages help—and so on down the line.

This Primary Job of producing real wealth holds the key to the whole problem. On this job all mankind depends for food, shelter and clothing. Out of the ground is taken the food by labor, using seed and tools (capital). Out of the ground are taken the materials of shelter, also of clothing, by labor using capital, itself a product of previous labor. The fashioning of food, shelter and clothing into refined and desirable forms is part of this Primary Job, also the exchange and distribution of them. The thing that must not be

overlooked is that they all come out of the ground, that the Earth is the source of all wealth, the great storehouse of nature on which this Primary Job depends.

But there are other jobs besides this primary one, and it is these that confuse us. The rendering of services of myriad kinds employs many. The average citizen engages doctors, dentists, lawyers and the army of entertainers, singers, dancers, film stars, the comedians—and we pay the American court-jester tops. Eddie Cantor's new contract calls for \$16,500 a week for 30 minutes on the air. Thus we pay our clowns to divert us from realities.

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There can be no quarrel with the earnings of the renderers of necessary services. But under the shadow of this nebulous line there doubtless exists a vast army engaged in wasteful, parasitic pursuits that are part and parcel of a society top-heavy with wealth on the one hand and with poverty on the other. This takes no account of the multitude whose "jobs" consist in leeching off others, high-pressuring folks to buy what they cannot pay for, engaging in polite "securities" swindling and

direct racketeering and crime. It is because the Primary Job is so hard to get and hold that we have so much of the latter.

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The base of our material existence rests on this Primary Job of taking wealth from the ground, refining it and laying it down to the consumer. Of the three, taking it from the storehouse is most important, because it can be neither refined nor transported until wrested from nature. It is inescapable that the key to the job problem, then, is access to nature. The Earth's soil, its timber, oil and other minerals, its surface routes, their terminals, the falling water, the spots on the Earth's surface where men have gathered in trade and industrial centers—these all must be made available on equal terms before the producers can go to work on them. Access to the favored portions of the planet has long been denied, forcing the multitude onto poorer and poorer margins of land with attendant impoverishment through lower return for labor, and with the disappearance of the frontier altogether the locked-out army of men has been increasing.

The cost of access to nature, in city

and country, has risen steadily with our population and civilization, taking the form of the price and rent of land, in trade centers and the rural areas alike. The Primary Job of taking wealth from the ground has consequently been harder to get and to hold. Yet in the presence of idle, unused natural resources men who beg for work must go hungry, ill-housed, ill-clothed, denied a decent standard of living, eking out a precarious existence on relief, the cost of which threatens bankruptcy to the nation.

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Fortunately a new frontier extends to the very heart of our cities, lying at our feet waiting for a sane readjustment of our baronial system of land tenure. Not only the frontier of idle, unused or inefficiently-used ground, it is the frontier of **all** ground now yielding vast access fees (a social heritage) to the few who have done nothing to create such return.

To open up this new frontier is a matter of collecting the social product—the ground charge—by government. The frontier will be available in proportion as we make it unprofitable to monopolize nature.